

WMC Retrospective Research Findings and Early Insights

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The goal of this project was to evaluate the effectiveness of Project WISE (Workplace Initiative and Substance Education) in reducing substance use, medical care costs, and absenteeism; and in increasing job performance, job satisfaction, and the overall health of employees and their families. The Behavioral Health Research Center of the Southwest partnered with Lovelace Health Systems (LHS), a 208,000-member HMO, a physician group practice, and a statewide contractor network of several hundred MDs and other providers. The target population for the study was the LHS health care workers who provide as well as receive LHS services. Those workers and the support staff from the main hospital constituted the intervention group of about 1,950 employees. Clinics and support services at other sites constituted the comparison group of 1,350 employees. Based on various factors, neither population represented one traditionally high in substance abuse.

Components of the enhanced program at the intervention site were the employee wellness program or LEAPS (Lovelace Employees Adopting Preventive Strategies) and the LHS Personal Health Program. Each administered an HRA with alcohol-related questions; neither provided specific feedback about alcohol use. The LEAPs program requires a new employee orientation and presents a health guide with a section on alcohol and drug abuse to all employees. Videos on reducing alcohol and substance abuse prevention were part of the enhancement. People who took the HRA and were identified as having these risks: stress, poor eating habits, inactive lifestyles, or risky drinking, received a video. In addition, people identified as being risky drinkers got a booklet on decreasing alcohol use and low-risk drinking. The videos, the active lifestyle connection, stress management, and health eating connection were adapted for our program.

The Employee Assistance Program provides pre-employment drug testing, assessment counseling, and referral. The enhanced program includes voluntary training for supervisors

on recognizing and intervening in substance abuse problems. Drug and alcohol education classes will be offered for employees. Free, off-site, confidential brief counseling was a new addition to the intervention. A brochure describing the brief counseling, and other services was developed and sent out through mass mailings. Publicizing the program through health fairs was an important component.

The retrospective study ran from July 1, 1996 through June 30, 1998. The data for this study included demographic descriptions, human resources, and per-employee (and dependents) health care costs. In response to the HRA question on frequency of alcohol use “On average, how often do you drink beer, wine, liquor, or other drink containing alcohol,” the data were remarkably similar across two years of the survey, so the baseline appears to be stable.

The question on quantity was “On days that you drink, how many drinks do you usually have?” One drink was considered a 12-ounce beer, 4-ounce glass of wine, or 1-shot of liquor. The “readiness to change” question was “In the next 6 months or so, do you want to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink?” In summary, our intervention focuses on health care workers who were at relatively low risk. However, 15 percent fall into a moderate-to-high risk group for risky drinking. The retrospective study further describes health problems likely due to alcohol and drug use in this population and will be discussed by Dr. Lewis.